DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 271 150 JC 860 356

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TITLE An Approach to Postsecondary Accreditation with the Efficient Use of Human Resources and Cost Containment Methods.
PUB DATE [85]
NOTE 27p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Accreditation (Institutions); Certification; Evaluation Criteria; *Evaluation Methods; *Organizational Effectiveness; *Program Evaluation; Quality Control; *Self Evaluation (Groups); Summative Evaluation; Two Year Colleges
IDENTIFIERS *New Hampshire Vocational Technical College

ABSTRACT

A single self-study method for both institutional and program accreditation was developed and field-tested at New Hampshire Vocational-Technical College in an effort to increase the efficiency and lower the cost of the self-study component of the accreditation process. The first phase in the development of the self-study method involved conceptualizing, planning, and organizing the project. This phase included the following steps: the administrative discussion, committee assignment, agency guidelines procurement, accrediting agencies input, and committee charge and assignments. The second phase, which focused on the method and format of the self-study, involved committee meetings and analysis of present requirements for the self-study, followed by the organization of materials into a new self-study format. This phase included: (1) the development of headings to include all information and data required by all agencies; (2) the classification of data as "common" to both institutional and programmatic accreditation requirements, "programmatic" information required by all programmatic accrediting agencies, and "distinct" data required only by one of the agencies; (3) determination of the print format; and (4) the review for completedness. The field-testing of the approach found that it was possible to determine "common," "programmatic," and "distinct" information based on agency guidelines and that the single self-study method was validated and accepted by six institutional and programmatic accrediting agencies. (RO)

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An Approach to Postsecondary Accreditation with the Efficient Use of Human Resources and Cost Containment Methods

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Running Head: An Approach to Postsecondary Accreditation

An Approach to Postsecondary Accreditation with the Efficient Use of Human Resources and Cost Containment Methods

Educational accreditation in the United States has become a very important factor in determining educational quality. Institutional accreditation asks whether the institution is doing what it claims to be doing based on its philosophy and scope and whether it meets minimum standards as established by the accrediting agency. In program or specialized accreditation, certain accepted essentials developed by the program accrediting agency must be followed.

The accreditation process involves four broad components: (a) a clear statement of educational objectives as developed by the institution, (b) the self-study, (c) the on-site committee visitation to the institution, and (d) the action of the accrediting agency regarding the accreditation status of the institution. The purpose of the self-study is to assess how well established institutional objectives are being met in the eyes of representatives of that institution. The self-study process, which normally requires at least a year to complete, is considered by many to be the most important phase of the accreditation process. A visiting committee spending only three to five days on campus cannot possibly cover every aspect that the self-study includes. The self-study is used by the visiting committee, along with the on-site visit, for first-hand observations in determining if the institution or program meets the essentials or standards of the accrediting agency.

Along with the institutional accreditation, postsecondary vocational-technical institutions might have a number of programs to be accredited, all requiring costly human resources. The essence of the present state of affairs is that multiple programs and multiple accrediting agencies cause a great deal of duplication of effort in the preparation of the individual program self-studies. The problem is proliferation, redundancy, and wasted time in doing parallel, and often incomplete, self-studies for multiple accreditation exercises or purposes. The presence of the problem diminishes the value of the activities. There is a very dire need, as seen by these institution administrators and faculties, to reduce the costs of accreditation greatly without threatening the purpose and validity of the evaluating process. In particular, the self-study process is seen as an area where a more efficient conceptualization and method might reduce the extreme financial and personnel costs resulting from multiple accreditations in a single institution. A single self-study method and format, proven to be conceptionally and methodologically valid, could result in significant containment of costs.

The prime incentive for a new self-study method is to increase the efficiency and lower the costs of the self-study phase of the accreditation process. There is a wealth of common data that is used for institutional accreditation and a number of program accreditations within an institution. When this data is systemically identified, the need to collect it over and over again will be eliminated.

Reduction in duplication of effort and increased efficiency will result. The fundamental result is that of increased efficiency without threatening valid data collection and organization.

The means by which information and data are stored and retrieved for the development and printing of the self-study will be dependent upon the available hardware at the institution. The use of only typewritten copy and a copy machine, with cutting and pasting of material, can produce the same results as are obtained by more sophisticated methods. In contrast, the availability and utilization of a word processor, a microcomputer with printing capacity or the more complex computer hardware will ensure more efficiency and cost containment.

Research Questions

The major reason for researching and proposing a new self-study method was to increase efficiency and lower the cost of the self-study phase of the accreditation process. The following research questions are derived from the statement of the problem and the review of the literature which can be found in the complete dissertation (Stoodley, 1982). The first two research questions address the development of the single self-study method and the third question deals with the summative evaluation of the efficiency and effectiveness of the new method.

1. What common information and distinct program component information are necessary to collect for accreditation at the New Hampshire Vocational-Technical College?
2. How can the information be organized into a self-study

system in constructing a self-study document for various program and institutional accrediting purposes?

3. Will the system of a single self-study method serve to meet the requirements in a formal program accreditation of a two-year postsecondary institution?

Procedures

The procedures used in the development of a single self-study method for use in two-year postsecondary institutional and multi-program accreditation are divided into two phases, as illustrated in Figure 1. The single self-study conceptual development, Phase1, involves conceptualizing, planning and organizaing the project. Phase 2, self-study method and format, requires committee meetings and analysis of present requirements for the self-study segment of accreditation, followed through with the organization of materials into a new self-study format. The end results of these two phases will be the collection of all data into a completed self-study.

Single Self-Study Conceptual Development

The conceptual phase of the development of the single self-study method is to determine how a postsecondary institution can bring together the resources of existing personnel to embark on an orderly process of organization to establish accreditation requirements which are essential for its existence. The steps that follow represent a procedure in conceptualizing the model to be used.

Administrative discussion. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO)

and the Chief Instructional Officer (CIO) of the institution meet to determine what the required accreditation activities will be for the institution. This discussion should embrace both institutional and programmatic accreditation and the various deadlines, including the self study and on-site visit phases. Following the determination of the requirements and time tables, the CEO and the CIO discuss and review various ways in which the accreditation tasks can be most efficiently and economically performed while obtaining ultimate usefulness to the institution. At this time, the accreditation self-study phase will be explored and discussion centered around the feasibility and purpose of the development of a single self-study method for future institutional and programmatic accreditation.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Committee assignment. A project of this magnitude must involve more than one or two administrators; hence a committee is the best answer. It is at this time the CEO and the CIO should select individuals to serve on the committee known as the Single Self-Study Method Project Committee. Representation on the committee should include: the CEO, the CIO, one instructional staff member representing each of the programs to be accredited, a secretary to handle all the clerical tasks, and the individual who will serve as chairperson of the steering committee for institutional accreditation. The committee members will be furnished such information as: name of each committee member, department,

phone number, program represented, and the accrediting agency name and address for the program represented.

Agency guidelines procurement. After having determined the various programs to use in the project based on dates for accreditation review, the CIO or his/her designate, requests from the respective accrediting agencies printed materials needed to seek accreditation. These will include the Standards of Membership (Essentials) and the Self-Study Guidelines for institutional and various program accreditation. These materials will then be duplicated as needed for the committee.

Accrediting agencies input to the project. The receptiveness of each of the accrediting agencies to a new format for the self-study guidelines is important. Each agency is contacted and the project explained in detail. At this time, a commitment on behalf of the agency to validate the new format upon its completion is essential.

Committee charge and assignments. The first committee meeting is to be called by the CEO. At this meeting the CEO should explain in detail such items as:

1. Accreditation and its purpose
2. The self-study phase
3. The project to develop a single self-study method and its purposes and objectives
4. Future meeting formats
5. The role of each committee member
6. Importance of meeting deadlines

The CEO distributes copies of the institutional accrediting agency's Standards of Membership (Essentials) and the Self-Study Guidelines to each committee member. Each program committee individual should receive a copy of the Standards of Membership (Essentials) and the Self-Study Guidelines pertaining to his/her respective program as published by the national accrediting agnecy. All members should be asked to review and become familiar with these documents for discussion at future meetings. Dates and agenda for meetings should be established and distributed prior to the next meeting by the CEO.

Self-Study Method and Format

With the Single Self-Study Project Committee organized and the responsibilities clearly defined, the next phase of developing the method and format is started. During the next series of meetings all information is to be classified.

Standards (Essentials) headings. Although the basic accreditation process involves similar standards (essentials), the titles or headings of these vary slightly in their wording; some standards have headings that others do not. It is necessary to develop headings that will include all information and data required by all agencies. The CEO or the CIO requests that the committee concentrate on the headings of the various standards (essentials) as published by the accrediting agencies under study and reach a consensus as to a new set of headings that will be adaptable to all accreditation. After careful analysis and discussion, the committee will have new inclusive standard (essential) headings.

Data classification system. Much information or data required in

the original agency Self-Study Guidelines are required by all or several of the other guidelines. This is where duplication of information and data can be searched out. The method classification necessary to sort out all duplication is explained to and discussed with the committee. The classification is as follows:

A. Common data. Common data are items of information required by both institutional and programmatic accrediting agencies during the self-study process as found in the agencies' self-study guidelines. The institutional accrediting agency's self-study guidelines are the most comprehensive relative to the total institution. It is for this reason that these guidelines are used as a baseline in comparing and analyzing data required by the individual programmatic accrediting agencies. All duplicate information necessary to or requested by all accrediting agencies collectively is termed common data.

B. Programmatic data. Programmatic data are all duplicate items of information required by all the programmatic accredititng agencies, but not required by the institutional accrediting agency.

C. Distinct data. Distinct data are items of information required only by the institutional, or by each separate programmatic, accrediting agency.

Classification of data. As a base in comparing the various Self-

Study Guidelines and the information and data required, the institutional Self-Study Guidelines should be used. The institutional guidelines are the most inclusive and require most common information in relation to the overall institution. Using each standard (essential), the CEO or the CIO reads each question pertaining to the information or data required from the original institutional Self-Study Guidelines. Each individual representing a program decides whether the same information or data are required in that program's guidelines. If all individuals react positively, then the information or data required are Common Data. This procedure should be carried through until the review of the guidelines is complete. The committee should also edit the language of the questions to amalgamate similar questions into one without distorting the purpose of the questions. This is done throughout the entire classification system, as illustrated in Figure 2.

Insert Figure 2 about here

Level two of the classification system is illustrated in Figure 3. One member of the committee representing a program now leads the discussion and analysis of the remaining information and data not classified as common. This individual reviews the information or data required under each standard (essential). If the same or duplicate information or data are required by all the other program guidelines and not the institutional guidelines, then required information or data is classified as

Program Data. Editing, as with common data, is used in developing program data.

Insert Figure 3 about here

The final level of classification yields all remaining information or data that are required only by the institutional guidelines and by the program guidelines. This classification is Distinct Data. Figure 3 and Figure 4 illustrate Distinct Data.

Insert Figure 4 about here

The entire classification of Common, Program, and Distinct Data is illustrated in Figure 4. The two large circles illustrate the relation between institutional and programmatic data. The circle on the left indicates that institutional data can be classified as common or distinct, whereas the circle on the right indicates that the program data can be classified as common, programmatic, or distinct.

Several committee meetings and outside work by members will accomplish the task of classifying all the information and data; by consensus, the new self-study format will be developed.

Print format. The secretary, who attends all meetings and records all business, organizes and types the classified information and data questions under the appropriate standard (essential) heading. This

information can now be entered into a word processor using disks for each classification of Common, Program, and Distinct Data. The secretary is then able to retrieve a complete self-study format for the institution as a whole or for any of the programs under study. At a later date, the secretary can retrieve and retype the format, filling in the actual required information and data to do a complete self-study.

Review format for completeness. A committee meeting should be held and a printout of the completed self-study format distributed to each member of the committee. The institutional self-study format will be reviewed by the individual representing institutional accreditation and each program representative will receive a copy of that program format. The individuals will be asked to do a final review of the document for errors or omissions and make corrections. The documents will be corrected by the secretary.

Self-Study Format Field Test

A complete self-study format utilizing the newly devised method is printed and bound. The format now is ready for submission to the institutional accrediting agency and to each of the program accrediting agencies employed by the project. The agencies are asked to compare the two formats and to validate the new one. Subsequent to review and acceptance by the agencies, the new format may be used in a complete formal accreditation process.

In an effort to maintain a time-frame to meet various deadlines, a Program Evaluation and Review Technique (PERT) method was developed.

Since it is the usual practice for postsecondary institutions to operate on an academic year, the PERT covers a period from August to June. A sample PERT is shown in Figure 5.

Insert Figure 5 about here

Sequence of PERT Events

The Program Evaluation and Review Technique (PERT) Flow Chart is used to describe procedures and time lines to be followed in the development and evaluation of the single self-study. For this project a time frame of one academic year is used.

1. Start
2. Discussion of the project between the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and the Chief Instruction Officer (CIO)
3. CEO AND CIO determine programs that will be involved in the self-study project, together with the institutional accreditation
4. CIO writes for current institutional and program accreditation self-study guidelines from agencies
5. CEO meets with CIO to discuss the project and select the chairperson for the steering committee of institutional accreditation
6. CEO meets with CIO to select the single self-study project committee

7. CIO meets with secretary for a briefing of the project
8. CIO writes letters to invite project committee members to serve
9. CEO and CIO meet with the project committee to discuss the conceptual development and plan the project
10. CIO contacts Council on Allied Health Education Accreditation (CAHEA), if necessary, regarding its willingness to explore a new self-study format
11. CIO contacts the institutional accrediting agency regarding its willingness to explore a new self-study format
12. CIO contacts the various program accrediting agencies regarding their willingness to explore a new self-study format
13. Meeting of the project committee to discuss the technique of the data classification system
14. Meeting of the project committee to finalize the technique
15. Meeting of the project committee to assign tasks
16. Meeting of the project committee to develop the data reporting format
17. CIO meets with secretary to determine the data and/or word processing input procedures
18. Meeting of the project committee to develop the self-study guidelines and procedures manual
19. Meetings of the project committee until all data has been classified

20. Meeting of the project committee to review the draft documents
21. Meeting of the project committee to approve the final format, which will be validated
22. New self-study format is evaluated (Field Test) by various accrediting agencies involved in the project
23. Meeting of the project committee to discuss evaluation results and the future use of the new self-study method
24. Meeting of the project committee to dissolve the committee
25. Finish

The New Self-Study Guidelines

Now that the classification of data is complete, it is possible to retrieve the new self-study guidelines for each individual program and the institution. It is also possible now to proceed to answer the questions or to supply the required data for all common, program, and distinct classifications. As the required information is received in response to individual queries, it is entered into the data processor.

Sources of Data. The newly developed self-study method, now completed, is ready for the collection of required information pertaining to the institution and various programs to be accredited. A wealth of information and data is readily available and can be gathered to conclude the self-study. Sources that can be used include but are not limited to:

1. National reports

2. State reports and manuals
3. Institution reports, manuals, handbooks, and materials
4. Various records of meetings

The required information and data can now be retrieved as a completed self-study for each program and/or the institutional accrediting agency.

Findings

The findings of the research project are based on three research questions stated earlier.

1. It was possible through procedures described in this report to determine common, programmatic, and distinct information based on the use of various accrediting agency self-study guidelines. Through the involvement of a committee using agency self-study guidelines, all required information and data were obtained and then synthesized into conceptual self-study models.
2. The information required by various accrediting agencies according to their self-study guidelines, can be classified into three categories: common, programmatic, and distinct. These three classifications of data can now be collected, typed, and stored in a data processor. The format developed has all the questions and the required data or information stored to produce a complete self-study.

3. The newly developed single self-study method was validated and accepted by the following accrediting agencies:

   New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC)

   American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA)

   Joint Review Committee for Respiratory Therapy (JRCRT)

   American Medical Assistant Association (AMAA)

   American Medical Record Association (AMRA)

   Committee on Allied Health Education and Accreditation (CAHEA) of the American Medical Association (AMA)

The entire completed self-study, incorporating the new format, was used in conjunction with the on-site visit for the AMRA and CAHEA. The acceptance of the new self-study method by these accrediting agencies and the ultimate recommendation for accreditation, together with the acceptance of the new format by the NEASC, AOTA, JRCRT, and AMAA, clearly indicate that the new self-study method is a valid means to accomplish the concern as stated previously. (Since the research study was concluded, two formal accreditation processes using the new single self-study method have been conducted by the NEASC and AOTA.)

This project was successful in developing a single self-study method for use in two-year postsecondary institution and multi-program accreditation. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that similar institutions might wish to replicate this method.

Summary

Cost containment and investments for the self-study phase of

accreditation are the key issues. Additionally, cost and efficiency gains provide greater opportunity for institutions to focus on the primary objectives of the process. The investment, as it relates to returns, must be such that maximum returns serve the institution, the clientele, and the accrediting agency. A major portion of costs for the self-study phase is the amount of personnel time involved. The use of a single self-study method could greatly reduce these costs by an estimated 50 percent. The savings will vary depending on such items as the size of the institution, number of programs, geographic location, particular accrediting agency or agencies involved, and equipment available to store and retrieve information.

Reference

Stoodley, R. V. The Development and Evaluation of a Single Self-Study Method for Use in Two-Year Postsecondary Institution and Multi-Program Accreditation (doctoral dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1982) Dissertation Abstracts International, 1982, 43/08, 2646 (University Microfilms No. 83-03018).

Figure Captions

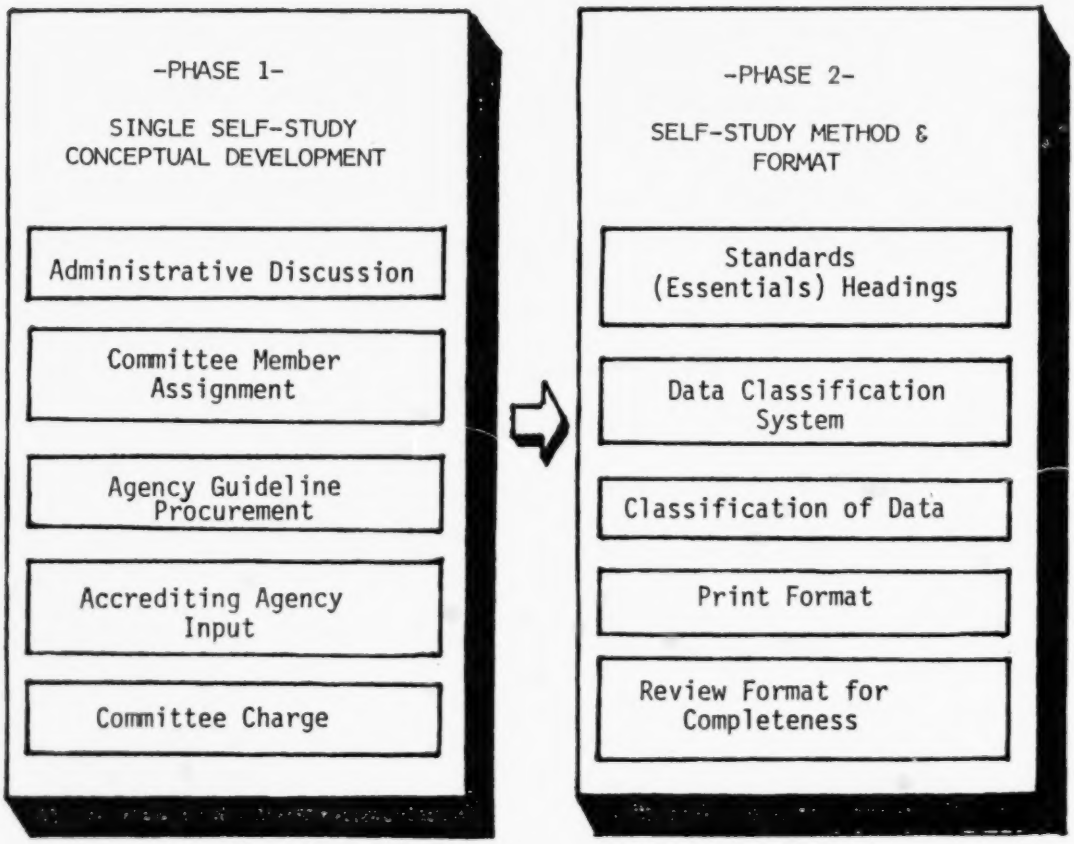
Figure 1. Procedures illustration for the development and evaluation of a single self-study method for use in two year postsecondary institutional and multi-program accreditation.

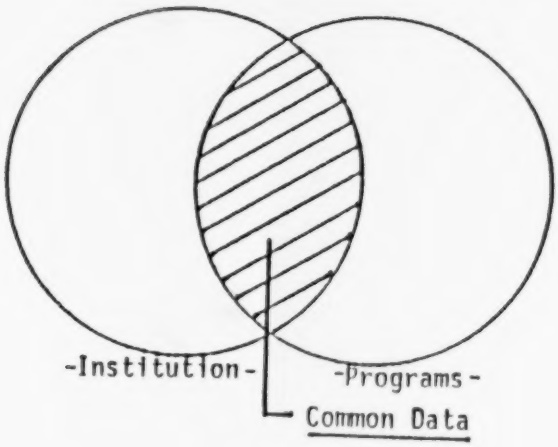
Figure 2. Level one of the classification of data determined common to institutional and program self-study guidelines. The shaded area illustrates identical information requested by all agencies.

Figure 3. Level two of the classification of data in determining duplicate program data and distinct program data from the program accrediting agencies self-study guidelines.

Figure 4. Single self-study method for use in two year postsecondary institutional and multi-program accreditation showing over-lapping common and program data and distinct data for institutional and programmatic accreditation as derived from the agencies self-study guidelines.

Figure 5. The development and evaluation of a single self-study method for use in two year postsecondary institution and multi-program accreditation (a typical academic year project).


-PHASE 1-
SINGLE SELF-STUDY CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT
Administrative Discussion
Committee Member Assignment
Agency Guideline Procurement
Accrediting Agency Input
Committee Charge
-PHASE 2-
SELF-STUDY METHOD & FORMAT
Standards (Essentials) Headings
Data Classification System
Classification of Data
Print Format
Review Format for Completeness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-Programs-
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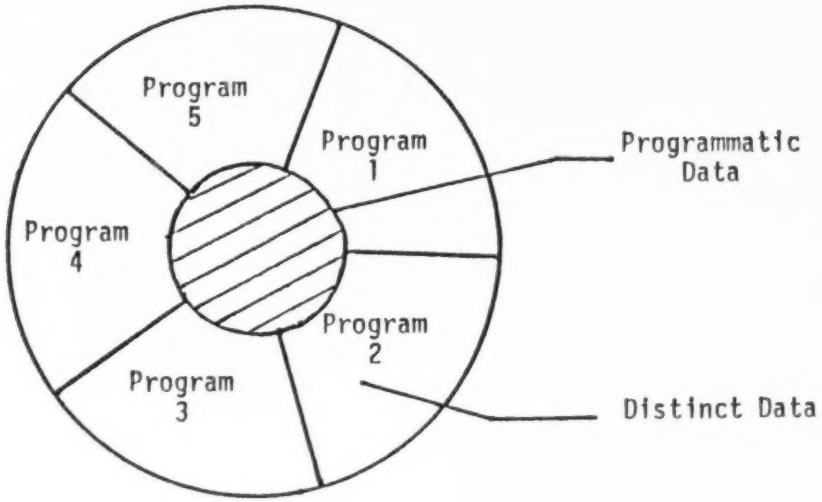
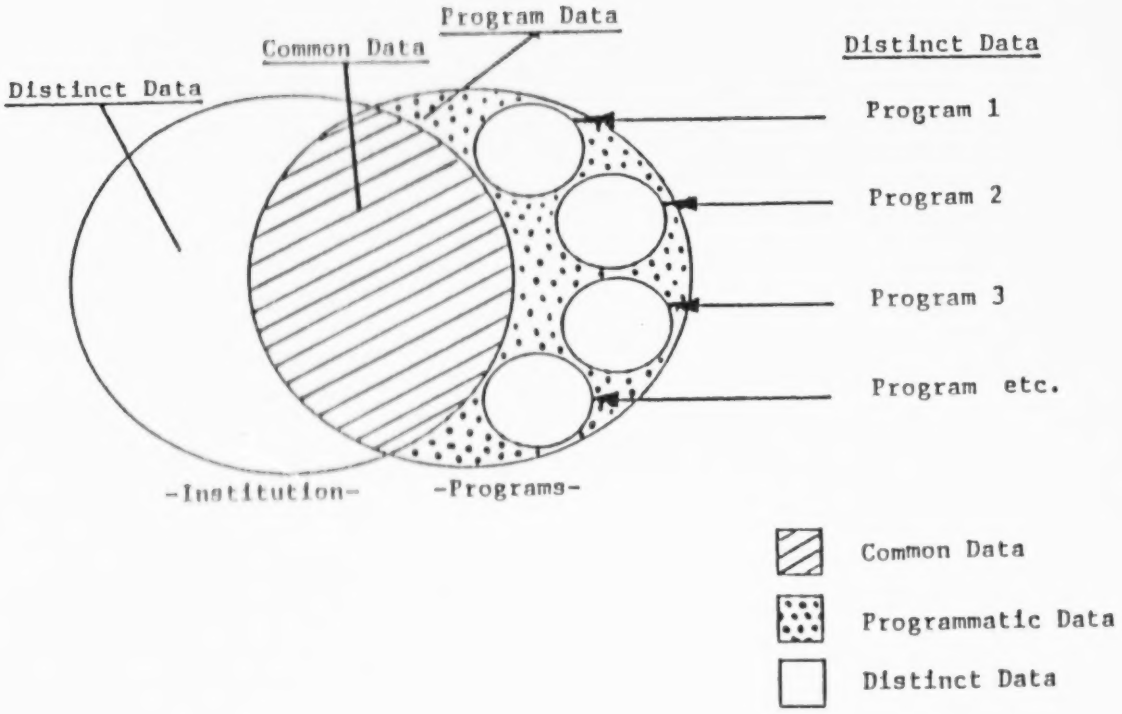
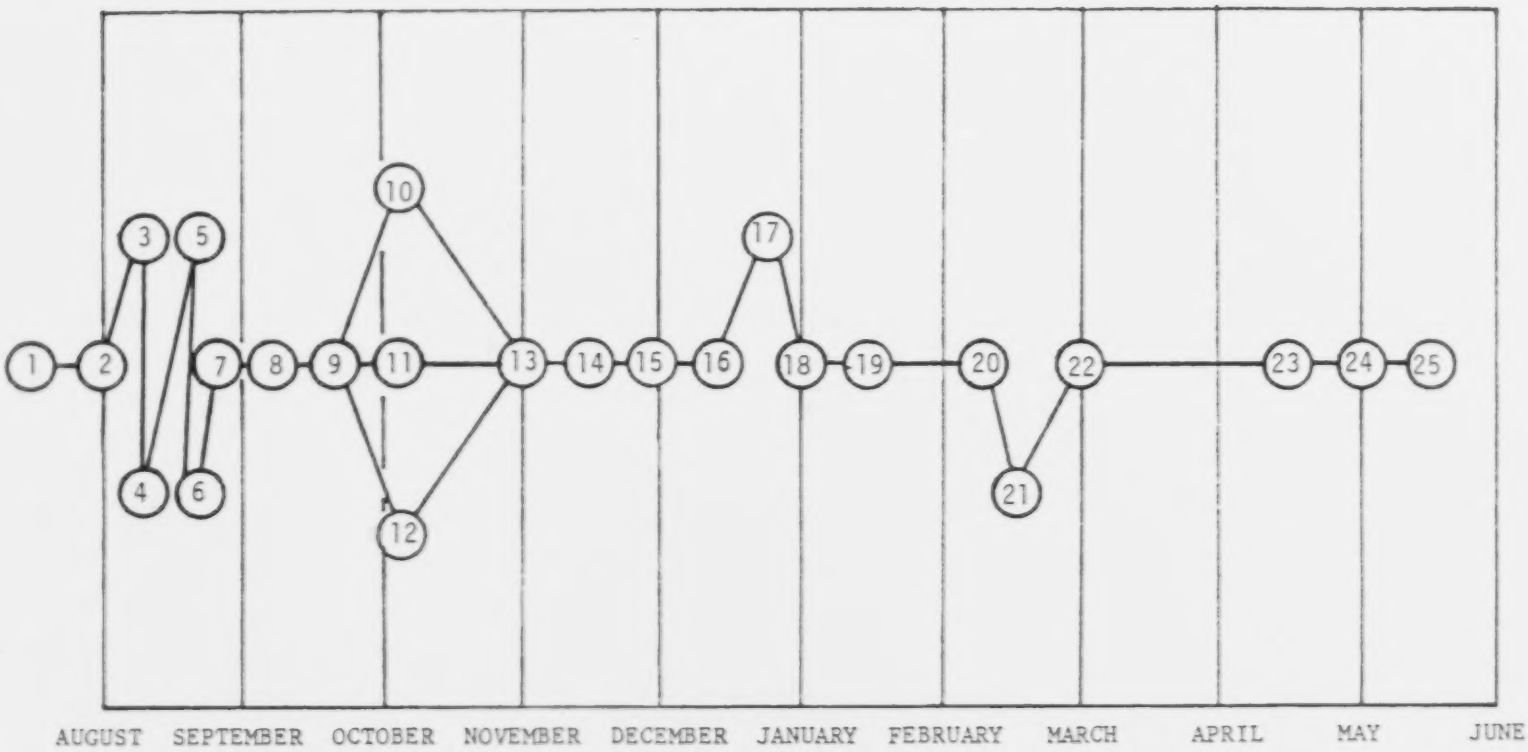

Program 5
Program 1
Programmatic Data
Program 4
Program 2
Program 3
Distinct Data


Program Data
Common Data
Distinct Data
Distinct Data
Program 1
Program 2
Program 3
Program etc.
-Institution-
-Programs-
Common Data
Programmatic Data
Distinct Data



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